DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 072 RC 020 632

AUTHOR McKerrow, Kelly
TITLE Advocacy and Ideology: Confrontation in a Rural School District.
PUB DATE 15 Mar 96
NOTE 30p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association (New York, NY, April 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; Administrators; Advocacy; Boards of Education; Conflict; Elementary Secondary Education; Group Dynamics; *Organizational Climate; Parent Grievances; Parent Participation; *Parent School Relationship; Participative Decision Making; *Power Structure; Resistance to Change; *Rural Schools; School Districts; Small Schools; *Special Education
IDENTIFIERS *Institutional Responsiveness

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a critical qualitative account and analysis of resistance and contestation over the decision-making process in a special education program. The parties involved were four parent advocates, who formed an advocacy organization, and the school administration in a rural school district in the Midwest. A subtle but powerful bias against rural parents by educators and an accompanying "urban bias" to most educational research frame the context in which this detrimental process took place. How these groups used the elements of cultural capital (income and material resources, work and competence, confidence, and networks) in their efforts to achieve domination is examined. The organizational reaction of "cooling out the mark" (consoling or placating advocates in such a way that the structural inevitability of their failure is concealed from them) provides an additional dimension for understanding how such organizations exclude outsider input. None of the administrative or advocacy activities resulted in legitimate shared decision making as intended by law. Both groups used hegemonic cultural assumptions to justify the build-up of capital to limit the other group's domination of the process. This focus on "winning" and allegiance to a dysfunctional organizational ideology usurped genuine attempts to make decisions that were mutually shared by the administration and parent advocates. If the issues that face special education are precursors to issues of restructuring, this case should serve as an example, albeit a bad one. It exposes the futility of pursuing organizational strategies that are antithetical to shared decision making and ultimately, restructuring. Contains 35 references. (TD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 410 072

Advocacy and Ideology:

Confrontation in a Rural School District

Kelly McKerrow

Department of Educational Administration and Higher Education
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale

Draft dated March 15, 1996

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

K. Kelly McKerrow

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

RC 020632

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ADVOCACY AND IDEOLOGY: CONFRONTATION IN A RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Kelly McKerrow

DRAFT
March 15, 1996

Codd (1982) contends that " . . . the field of special education has been especially prone to forms of technical domination and political manipulation in which the underlying ethical dilemmas have remained largely unexamined" (p. 9). In rural areas, research on special education issues has focused primarily on access to services and staffing problems (DeYoung, 1987). The purpose of this paper is to present a critical qualitative account and analysis of special education advocacy in one rural school district in the Midwest. The research examines the intense dialectical process of resistance and contestation over the decision-making process between four parent advocates and the school administration.

This research suggests that both educational and advocacy organizations are exclusionary and that their interaction is centered around domination and subordination, not shared decision-making. A subtle but powerful "hegemony of ruralness" frames the context in which this detrimental process takes place. How these groups dominate is examined using Lareau's (1989) work on cultural capital. The organizational reaction of "cooling out the mark" (Goffman, 1952; Parker, 1995) also provides an additional dimension for understanding how these organizations exclude outsider input. None of the administrative or advocacy activities resulted in legitimate shared decision-making as intended by law. Both of the groups used hegemonic cultural assumptions to justify the build up of capital to limit the

other groups domination of the process. This focus usurped genuine attempts to make decisions that were mutually shared by the administration and parent advocates.

The impact of special education law on public schools has been nothing short of dramatic. This case is one example of how educators, parents, and advocates are renegotiating their relationships. If the issues that face special education are precursors to issues of restructuring, this case should serve as an example, albeit a bad one. It exposes the futility of pursuing organizational strategies that are antithetical to shared decision-making and ultimately restructuring.

Methodology and Data Sources

Participant-observation, interviews, and document analysis were the primary research tools used in this research. Data collection took place over five years (Patton, 1990; Wolcott, 1985). The researcher lives in the community, was the Director of Special Education from 1978 to 1984, and elementary principal from 1992 to 1994. The researcher and a colleague helped the parents establish the advocacy group Face to Face.

The anonymity of all subjects was protected by using code names for each proper name in the account. Reference to places was protected with code names as well. Triangulation (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) was used to secure reliability and validity of the data. Interviews were checked against letters, newspaper coverage, video, and audio tapes (Denzin, 1978; Smith, 1984; Stake, 1978). Data include: Board of Education minutes; newspaper accounts of the Board meetings since January of 1989; school district policies; State department records; budget records; community attitudes, as reflected in the call-in section and letters to the editor in the bi-weekly

newspaper; external, written communication from the administration to the parents; personal letters; legal documents, including the final reports of the Office of Civil Rights; and video-tapes of board of education meetings.

Interviews were a blend of open-ended and focused questions and narrative conversation between the primary researchers and each interviewee. Collective interviews examined particular events and their interpretation by the group. It is important to note that the superintendent and the Director of Special Services refused to be interviewed. All other individuals in the case were fully informed of the project and gave their consent.

One perspective that has been missing from the naturalistic research literature in education has been that of the parents. Educational, ethnographic research examines students, teachers, and administrators (Smith, 1982). This study is unique in that it looks at parents and advocates. Results of the observations and interviews are presented in a vignette entitled: "Face to Face and Toe to Toe". The vignette, along with additional background data are critiqued in subsequent sections. The analysis that follows is based upon the aforementioned data as interpreted by the researcher.

FACE TO FACE AND TOE TO TOE

In 1989, Sarah Farmer, Joan Mason, Mary Reed, and Kate Hahn founded the special education advocacy group Face to Face. A colleague and I acted as their university advisors. We helped them write their handbook and secured not-for-profit status for the new organization. We developed inservice activities that were presented at local, state, and national special education conferences. Both of us worked closely with the parent advocates (Alpert, Schloss, &

Schloss, 1995) for two years. The Face to Face philosophy displayed prominently at the beginning of their handbook reads:

> Parents have to be recognized as special educators, the true experts on their children; and professional people--teachers, pediatricians, psychologists, and others--have to learn to be consultants to parents.

Face to Face

What led to their collective effort in rural Andrew county was a series of individual frustrations with the school district administration. William Holifield, Director of Special Services, refused to accept outside evaluations on students (OCR Investigative Report, No. 07901028). He felt that the local school evaluations were sufficient for determining the needs of the students. In an attempt to force the district to consider external evaluations during diagnostic staffings, Face to Face became involved in the first due process hearing in the district. The parents prevailed and the district was compelled to provide services for a middle school student diagnosed by "outsiders" as learning disabled. The district reluctantly complied.

Joan Mason's case was another thorn in the director's side. External evaluators were recommending that her son's speech therapy services be delivered by a therapist with a masters degree. Joan also had evaluations that recommended occupational therapy services. The district speech therapist did not have a masters degree and there was no occupational therapist in the district. This meant costly contractual services through the regional university. Joan brought "outsiders" from the university to her son's individualized education program (IEP) meetings to strengthen her case for special services. Some of the meetings were two and three hours long.

Frustrated over Joan's demands, Holifield wrote an angry letter

to the president of the university. He accused the university professors of "taking an unsolicited role in the operations of local districts." He stated that they wanted "to gain influence" and to advance personal gain" (W. Holifield, letter, March 15, 1989). The inflammatory letter resulted in a public display of contestation by the advocates and resistance by the administration. The professors threatened a lawsuit and the superintendent banned their attorney from speaking publicly to the Board of Education. When the parent advocates appeared before the board to express their concerns, the board of education publicly humiliated them. The community rallied behind the advocates after viewing the meeting on the local cable community access channel. An editorial appeared in the local newspaper. It read:

> The Face to Face organization deserves this community's support. When Face to Face members tell the Andrew's County Board there are big problems in its Special Services Department, the board is making a big mistake by not paying close attention to what these parents are saying . . . By our observation, the school board looks at these Moms and Dads as a handful of disgruntled troublemakers who pester board members with letters and phone calls about how concerned they are about their children; they expect the board to look for ways to resolve their problems; they have the nerve to think the board would actually welcome discussing their concerns; the troublemakers even think they have the right to speak their piece, right in public, in front of the whole school board. Good job, Moms and Dads. Keep it up. ("Stick to Your Guns ...", 1989)

The board was also advised to:

> Make How to Win Friends and Influence People required reading for your superintendent and coordinator of Special Services. Your managerial types need to brush up on their people skills. ("Stick to Your Guns ...", 1989)

The parent advocates felt as if they were "getting no where with the administration." Kate said it took her three years to get her son diagnosed. Joan waited six months for occupational therapy. Secure in the knowledge that the community supported their efforts, they

signed a complaint with the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). Face to Face was instrumental in facilitating the OCR investigation. They allowed the investigators to use the Farm Bureau office on the courthouse square. They coordinated the interviews and gathered information for the investigators. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) investigative report found the district in violation of students' rights and documented incidences of "rudeness" toward and "retaliation" against the students' parents (OCR Investigative Complaint, No.07901028, May 29, 1990, p. 43).

The mutual animosity between the administration and the parent advocates heralded dramatic changes in the district. Holifield left the district. He negotiated a $25,000.00 package to do so immediately. The Superintendent was fired. Face to Face put up their own school board candidates and initiated an annual Meet the Candidates forum before each election. This researcher wrote the questions that were asked during the televised interviews. This strategy worked. The Board of Education president was deposed and within two years the entire makeup of the Board of Education changed. The new administrators and the new board members were extremely sensitive to the issues raised by Face to Face. They responded with fundamental changes in the administration of special education programs. Their efforts to respond to the parent advocates was successful and the intense activism began to wane by 1992.

Sarah and Joan maintain their activities on behalf of Andrew county parents. Attendance is low but Face to Face still has meetings and inservice activities. Over the past five years, Joan and Sarah have gained a reputation as local special education gadflies. They have expanded their services to other school districts in the area and

attend training institutes to develop their advocacy skills. They continue to attend IEP meetings but they are not welcomed in the schools, especially by the special education teachers and administrators.

Mary and Kate subsequently dropped out of Face to Face in 1992 when "things got out of hand." They were generally satisfied with the services that their children were receiving and lost patience with Sarah's "mission to save every kid in the southeast region of the state." Mary expressed her frustration at Sarah's persistence: "Sarah's crazy! She's possessed. What does she want? What does she want? What does she want?"

My colleague and I completed our work with Face to Face. We were not called upon as often as we were during the first two years. My colleague accepted a faculty position at a private university in the area. I applied for the position of elementary principal at Andrews Elementary school. During the faculty interview, Joan, who was allowed to attend, asked me the questions I had written for the Meet the Candidates forum. I got the job. The shoe was on the other foot. A year later the other one dropped.

Toe to Toe

Dr. Limpek, the new superintendent, made one of his rare visits to my office. He handed me a letter written by the Hiesmans. It accused me of: lack of objectivity in the evaluation of their son and influencing the test results (B. Heisman & H. Heisman, letter, January 9, 1994). They mailed the letter to the Director of Special Services, Pat Sherman, Superintendent Limpek, the board president and one of the university professors involved in the Holifield incidence five years earlier.

The letter was a reaction to my refusal to concur in a diagnosis of autism on their son. I requested another external evaluation by a specialist. I exercised my right to attach a dissenting opinion to the evaluations that the parents brought to the staffing. The evaluations they brought were conducted by a speech therapist and a masters prepared psychologist who had no experience with autistic children. Joan was at the meeting with Mrs. Heisman, advocating on her behalf. She failed to respond to the logic that, five years ago, made her insist upon a more qualified speech therapist for her son.

My response to the letter from the parents was a combination of anger and righteous indignation. I consulted an attorney. In a memo to the superintendent, I asked that he review the letter I intended to send the Heismans. I ended with the following:

> Thank you for sharing the letter that was written by Grace and Henry Heisman . . . This cuts to the very heart of my role as the building principal and I simply cannot allow these charges to go unanswered . . . even if it means that the Board will perceive me as contentious . . . Thank you for your consideration in this matter. (K. McKerrow, memo, January 32, 1994)

Dr. Limpek reviewed my letter, which threatened a lawsuit (K. McKerrow, letter, January 21, 1994). He did not offer any advice and I never sent the letter. A week later he requested a meeting. He wanted "to see if we can resolve our apparent conflicts in an effort to create a partnership which allows us to focus on a win-win environment" (R. Limpek, letter, January 27, 1994). The Heismans did not respond to the request. Their son was diagnosed autistic. Their demands for programming were met.

THE HEGEMONY OF RURALNESS

Andrew County School District #47 is a rural district that has all the educational, cultural, and economic problems of "smallness."

It also has the benefits of "ruralness" like a strong sense of community, a basic appreciation for education, and a concern for the youth it serves (Capper, 1990; DeYoung, 1987; DeYoung & Lawrence, 1995; Rosenfeld, 1981; Seal & Harmon, 1995; Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995; Wei, Shapero, & Boggess, 1993). These issues frame the way that rural communities are perceived and treated from an ideological perspective by insiders and outsiders, educators and parents (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). Like most perspectives on rural life, they focus on problems and exclude consideration of the benefits.

DeYoung and Lawrence (1995) speak to this exclusionary ideology. "Most professional educators seem convinced that learning is either free of context and independent of place or that rural parents and communities don't really know what is good for their children"(p.108). In addition to a generalized bias against rural parents by educators, DeYoung (1987) suggests that there is an "urban bias" to most educational research - a hegemony of "ruralness" that operates at the research level. This case was no exception. After a long interview session one of the researchers said:

> I didn't have the four women pictured as articulate. I just didn't believe that four nonprofessional women would be this on top of things. They, they're all bright. They're all intelligent. They're all gutsy.

My response was defensive. "That surprises me . . . you've met other people in rural districts . . . have you been biased or what?" It is important to understand how this fundamentally negative notion of "ruralness" affected the perceptions and actions of the other individuals in this case. A similar rural lens affected Kate who was put off by the treatment she received at an IEP meeting: "They think that just because this is a small, rural community, that we all just fell off the pumpkin wagon." Mary's description of a meeting with the

local school board revealed her bias:

> . . . load it with "good ole boys. And in a rural community, its gonna be Billy Bob and Jimmy Joe sitting there and invariably it might be a neighbor. It may be a relative. It may be your husband's boss. And when these people become Board members and they go to sit behind this table, if you come to them [about your child] it's like "Well now, I know him. I know him since he's been a little boy. There's nothing wrong with him. I was like that when I was a little kid." They tend to talk to you that way.

Hegemony of ruralness can also result from realities of rural life as well as false perceptions. Robert Pridemore, the newspaper publisher explained what happened after he approved publication of the editorial:

> You've got to understand, also, its a very strange situation working in a small town. I'm a member of the Catholic church down here. I go there. Nan Walker [Board of Education president] goes there. Tim Lessor [Board member] goes there. Tom Mecker [Board member] goes there . . . Nan, to this day, will not even look my way or shake my hand.

Ruralness made some parent advocates justifiably concerned about retaliation from the administration. Sarah said: "I was worried we were in a small town. I was worried about repercussions. I didn't know how people were gonna take and feel about this whole issue." Joan had similar concerns: "From a parent's perspective, and I'm stating this coming from a rural community, a lot of people know each other in a rural community and the last thing you want to be is to be labeled a troublemaker for the school."

The Andrew county cultural context was perceived as modest by administrators, researchers, and even the parent advocates. These views were supported by the cultural assumption that "bigger is better" (Theobald and Nachtigal, 1995; Sher, 1995). Hegemonic cultural assumptions interacted with traditional organizational logic (Acker, 1990) to legitimate an authoritarian ideology that was descriptive of the way things were done in the educational community.

Since the parent advocates accepted the cultural and organizational assumptions, it is not surprising to see the issues fought on the ideological battlefield of domination and subordination. The parent advocates' resistance took on traditional organizational form. Mary knew how to resist: "You take their own stick and beat them over the head with it."

The advocates adopted defensive and offensive strategies that mimicked the educational organization. They got bigger. They shifted focus from individual needs to group goals. They became professionals. A pervasive hegemony of ruralness guided their efforts to cultivate the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Lareau, 1989) they assumed was necessary to become legitimate decision-makers in Andrew County School District #47. The elements of capital that the parent advocates found useful are identified in Lareau's (1989) work on families of elementary children. They are: income and material resources, work and competence, confidence, and networks. The elements of cultural capital are used to understand how the processes of contestation and resistance, domination and subordination unfold in this case.

Income and Material Resources

Monetary and material resources, especially in rural schools, put stress on the district budget and the ability to manage it. Traditional budgetary priorities were challenged by the increased parent advocate demands for special education programming. Additionally, the parent advocates had more time to devote to special education issues than the administration did. The parent advocates were demanding costly services. They were also demanding that a disproportionate amount of administrative time and energy be spent

administering programs designed for a few students.

In special education, "smallness" is problematic for many reasons. Rural communities have problems of access to the specialized services and resources required for students with disabilities (Capper, 1990; DeYoung & Lawrence, 1995; Seal & Harmon, 1995; Wei, Shapero, & Boggess, 1993). Monetary constraints present perennial problems, especially for expensive and often unanticipated contracted services. In some cases, they are considered unnecessary. Holifield told Joan that he "did not need to provide her son with a Cadillac education when regular students had to be content with a Ford." Finally, rural administrators are necessarily and ideologically educational generalists. They simply cannot know what agency specialists do about the law and services to disabled students. This puts them at a disadvantage to those who have time and free access to these resources.

Monetary issues, while not taken for granted, did not put undue stress on the advocates or their families. None of them worked outside the home when Face to Face was established. They each had spouses who worked full-time and provided all of the income for the families. More important than income was the ready access to professional resources. The parent advocates engaged a variety of regional, state, and federal agencies in their effort. Mary quipped that "Sarah had more toll-free numbers than MA Bell." When Joan was getting ready to file for due process she was referred to a university professor by a Speech Therapist. The professor referred her to the state funded Protection and Advocacy services. All of the professional resources that Face to Face used were compensated for their services with the exception of the researchers. These resources

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

were vital to Face to Face since none of the advocates had the financial ability to incur additional expenses.

The most important resource, however, was discretionary time. It was not unusual that the parent advocates spoke to each other on a daily basis and sometimes two and three times a day. Mary frequently mentioned the importance of being able to "take off a day and go lay out [at the pool] to get away from the pressure." Had the parent advocates worked outside the home, they would not have had the discretionary time to communicate so freely. Frequent communication, discretionary time, the willingness to access outside resources, and the freedom from monetary constraints provided enough cultural capital to overcome organizational inertia.

Work and Competence

In educational organizations, competence is assumed to exist. Organizational logic suggests that the individuals who fill positions do so because they are competent to do so. This logic is supported by certification requirements, job descriptions, performance evaluations and accountability standards (Acker, 1990). Organizational expectations do not include parent advocates as a part of the organizational decision-making process. What the parent advocates wanted to do did not make organizational sense. It ran counter to both organizational and parental role expectations in this rural community.

Parental involvement is taken to mean PTA work or support for childrens' schoolwork (David, 1989). Parents support the organization so that those in it can do their jobs. When the parent advocates attempted to make decisions, they broke an implicit professional lay boundary and defied the traditional logic that rationalized the

organizational structure. For parent advocates or anyone outside the organization, there is no logical mechanism to evaluate their competence. The perceived "incompetence by default" combined with a hegemony of ruralness, made it easy for the administration not only to ignore but to dismiss the parent advocates.

This attitude of the administration was manifested in condescension and authoritarianism. Joan's frequent and expensive requests, along with her persistent questioning of the administration, resulted in an angry response by the administration. She recorded Holifield's remarks at a lengthy IEP meeting:

> I am sick and tired of you coming in here and telling me what I have to do . . . From now on, I am not taking any information you bring from the university. I am not taking anything you're bringing down from Bishop DeBerg Children's Hospital. I don't wanta hear anything more from Dr. Lindsey Harmon. As far as I'm concerned, she's got her long nose in things that do not affect her. She doesn't know what she's talking about. She's incompetent. I don't wanta hear anything from your OT's or anything.

The parent advocates used condescension and authoritarianism to discredit the entire administration and teaching staff in the school. Joan was a vocal critic of the school's perceived incompetence:

> So, I mean, thank God we've had these professionals that did this. Had this been simply the school speech therapist, she would have never, you know, agreed to any of this. The kind of speech therapy that speech therapist gave did more harm than good.

The parent advocates' criticism of Holifield and the superintendent was equally as brutal. The use of outside professionals to criticize the efforts of the local administration was widespread among the parent advocates. The frequent use of the term "professional" to characterize anyone not in the school district served to reinforce the parents' position. It also called into question the expertise of school employees. The parent advocates even professionalized

themselves to establish competence. Sarah was well aware of the importance of being perceived as a professional:

> I have now come to truly appreciate the significant role an advocate has. An advocate can make such positive changes and I've had some of the best to learn from. I've also had to educate, educate, and educate myself. And then I became what I call a professional parent.

The parent advocates recognized the importance of becoming more than four rural parents if they were going to successfully resist administrative domination. In order to do that they needed the confidence that their rural social status provided them.

Confidence

In rural Andrew county, status is measured by parameters other than simple income. Education is one of them. Sarah would make sure that she included a reference to her "college education in the city" when she was introduced to new Face to Face members. Mary was glib in her references to education. "I came from the school of hard knocks. But my friends have all the education I need to deal with this district." Everyone knew that Joan's daughter was in medical school and that her son was studying architecture. Kate was praised for being able to go to school fulltime and raise a family at the same time.

Family history afforded a status, of sorts, in Andrew county. It is how people understand who someone is. Mary explains: "People look at you and then ask who your parents were so they can slot you." Kate, a Hahn from Smithton on the north side of the county makes it clear that she is not a Claryville Hahn. "They're all half a bubble off!" Sarah, and her husband Calvin, were big farmers from the east end where they still speak German in the homes. The fact that Calvin was president of the Farm Bureau, like his father before him, added

weight to their status in this agricultural town.

Religion is important to Andrew county residents. Some people continue to choose professional services by the religion of the business owner. Others refer to the marriage of a Catholic and a Lutheran as a "mixed marriage." The parent advocates were all educated in Catholic schools and wanted their children to get a parochial education. When the parochial schools could not provide the necessary special services, three of the parents transferred their children to the public school. Only Joan, whose brother was a Vincentian priest, kept her son in the Catholic school. She continues to bring him to the public school for services two and three times a week.

All of the parent advocates were surprised at low level of parental participation in the public school. Mary reported:

> We were all appalled at the complacency of the educational system. Plus, I was totally knocked off my feet at the first PTA meeting I went to. Nobody talked. Nobody stood up. Nobody said a damn thing. It was a talent show. I resented that. The bleachers were full. It was cut and dried. The president came up, banged the gavel. They didn't fund raise. They, there was not committees [sic]. It was a spectator sport to be a parent.

Within a year, Mary became the PTA president. Kate was president the following year. The confidence of a relatively well established rural social status combined with parochial school expectations for educational involvement were elements that promoted the parents' activism. There was another one. It was networking (Berkeley and Bull, 1995).

Networking

Mary explained how Face to Face got started:

> Word got around. It spread to other parents. Sarah called. I'd never met Sarah. I had no idea who Sarah was. I told her about Dr. McKeon's Reading Clinic. I started sharing my

> resources with her. By that time Kelly had been pulled in on it. I didn't know Kelly. I knew Pat. Pat knew Kelly. I got to know Kelly. I had friends that talked from one end of the state to the other.

The parents actively cultivated extra-local ties. This cosmopolitan approach was due to the availability of state and federal advocacy programs. The advocates used the services of the State Department of Education, Protection and Advocacy, the state IMPACT (Parent Act) agency and the Office of Civil Rights. Additionally, they called upon professionals from a major metropolitan area and the regional state university. Sarah was the cosmopolitan: "Look at my phone bill. But I felt like this was very important, networking, phone contact, follow-up, gentle reminders to parents . . . To persevere, network."

Networking also played a role in the administration's response to the increasing activism of Face to Face. There was a concerted effort to supplant the parent advocate network. Nan Walker, Board president used organizational logic to explain:

> If the parents had a problem there was a network set up for them. They could go to the teacher and then they could go to the principal and then go to the administration and to the school board. That's how you work through the channel network. But instead of doing that parents go straight to the paper or straight to the university people. They weren't going through channels.

The superintendent also exercised control through a network. Don Molind, a school board member, described how it worked:

> "They can make my life so miserable I'll scream like a cut hog." I heard that from a third grade elementary teacher. I heard that from a close friend . . . that's why I believe that Karl's [superintendent] network is real deep and thorough, and pervasive . . . because they got people they talk to and they got people they don't talk to and the ones who are real astute know who they can talk to and who they can't.

Pat Sherman, Holifield's replacement, was hired specifically

because he was a "townie". Don Molind recalled:

> He's already got all the inroads into the community, so he doesn't have to do anything more there to make himself more appreciated by the community. He's homegrown. Yeah, and he, he's networked all his life. He's got a better network system than most people.

The state and federal networks were viewed as obstacles clouded by deception. On every level, the parent advocates were initially met with understanding and a willingness to help. After a period, the organizations began to distance themselves from the group. This made the advocates even more determined. Joan called the regional director of OCR. It was not the first call that she made to the office:

> When I called up there (Office of Civil Rights) once and . . . I was wantin to talk to Dave Menendez. I talked to one of the other people who had been down here in our first investigation. Now apparently their office must be in one big room. They must discuss everything together . . . So again, there's a connection there of "buddy-buddy" and, please don't be puttin names on it but, I would put Dave Menendez right up there on top, because it was very obvious he was not following through with what he was telling me.

Joan did follow through, with a phone call to the Department of Education. The state department was also perceived as "a whole nother bureaucracy where it's so much of a buddy-buddy system." With the exception of Holifield, local organizational antagonism was never overtly expressed. Instead, persistent outsiders were "cooled out."

Cooling Out the Parents

When the organizational networks failed to "control" the activities of the parent advocates, a variety of administrative tactics were used to reverse the situation. The tactics were similar to a process described as "cooling out the mark." Parker (1985) following Clark (1960) and Goffman (1952) describes "cooling out the mark" as a con game that enables the "cooler", a confederate of the con artist, to befriend the "mark" in order to avoid having the

whistle blown on the con game. Parker states:

> . . . those who are denied their aspirations must be skillfully handled so as to mollify them and adapt them to failure while the structural inevitability of their failure is concealed from them. Their disappointment is to be reduced through the provision of alternatives, counseling, and consolation. Above all, the less successful have to be made to feel that their failure to attain was a personal failure and not the failure of the system. This reduces their inclination to inveigh against the system that first raised their aspirations only to shut the door. (p.180)

There were a number of incidences when the parents were being "cooled out." Joan reported that, during an administrative review, the superintendent asked her:

> "Would you be interested in a job here? You'd do great with public relations." And I laughingly told my husband. First he was being real nice and he couldn't get anywhere. Then he was being really mean and he couldn't get anywhere. So now he wants to put me on the payroll so he can shut me up.

One of the Pat Sherman's first actions was to befriend a woman with a lot of "cultural capital". Jeri Moore was a Catholic, hometown woman with money, a Masters degree, a husband on the Board of Alderman, discretionary time, and a son who was diagnosed with a learning disability. He had transferred from the Catholic elementary school. Together they established a group called the Parent Support Group. It was administered by the school and Jeri acted in an advisory capacity. They attracted more parents than Face to Face which was Pat Sherman's intent.

> I'll tell you buddy! No goofy group is going to mess up this office again. Beat 'em at their own game. Keep pounding away so that everybody figures out they're nuts. I'll work 36 hours a day to make sure we stay on top. They slit their bag and ran their foot through it. The Sarah and Joan Show is over - O-V-E-R - over!

Superintendent Limpek gave Face to Face unprecedented access to a number of processes that took place in the district. Face to Face participated in the selection process with the faculty when I was

being hired. They served on the Vocational, Elementary, and Special Education advisory counsels. Both of them were on the district-wide curriculum committee. When the facilities committee was formed they were there. They even came to administrative team meetings.

Joan and Sarah attended IEP meetings with parents several times a week. When IEP programming demands were made, they were met. When the new high school was under construction, the principal had tentatively placed all of the special education classes in the older building. Joan found out and threatened to contact the Office of Civil Rights. The plans were changed. This unprecedented access, along with what was perceived as unwarranted authority, caused resentment among the faculty and staff. Sensing the resentment, I too "cooled out the marks." Joan came to see me in late September. "Kelly, you know there is so much to be done! There is a real problem with teacher inservice and much more needs to be communicated to the parents." Unable to spend time on the issue, I offered an alternative:

> Joan, why don't you and Sarah write a monthly column for the Andrew's Elementary News. It goes out to all of the parents, the Board of Education, and the administration. Feel free to submit any articles that you want. I'll be happy to include them whenever you want me to.

No articles were ever submitted. I knew that they probably would not be written when I made the offer. Three years earlier my colleague and I did all of the writing for Face to Face because the parent advocates would not do it or could not do it.

Sarah and Joan were given permission by the superintendent to present a "mandatory" teacher inservice in the fall of 1993. The Professional Growth Committee, responsible for determining the inservice needs of the district, was not consulted. The teachers were

upset at having to attend an after-school meeting. They also felt that Face to Face was usurping other inservice priorities. I constructed a short evaluation form, something I never did for short, after-school inservices. I sent them the results (K. McKerrow, memo, February 22, 1993). Out of the 122 comments, a few were positive:

> It was good to hear they are looking and moving forward and not dwelling on the past.

Most of the comments were negative:

> I was upset that they think that they made all the changes or brought about all the changes. If information is necessary, I would prefer to hear it from an authority. I did not get a good feeling. I felt that they were here to defend their actions. They talked about the good they did, not the harm. Parents' are involved and they talked as if they aren't.

I knew they would be. Trying to hold Face to Face accountable for their actions was an attempt to "cool out the mark." They were made to feel that their failure was a personal one and not one of the system. Offering to let the advocates write for a newsletter, when it was clear that they would not, was another.

Job offers, usurping the network, conducting evaluations, establishing accountability, writing in school publications, and including the parent advocates in educational processes were all geared to give them the impression that they were participating in the educational organization. The administration, including this researcher, seemed to think that these short term inconveniences would stymie any long term threat to the current decision-making structure. There seemed to be a tacit understanding that inclusion of parent advocates in educational processes was not enough to legitimate them as organizational decision-makers despite the force of federal law. The administration would simply wait them out.

Cooling Out the Principal

"Marks" have to be managed so that "the structural inevitability of their failure" is concealed from them. Disappointment can be reduced through counseling and consolation. Above all, "marks" need to feel that their failure was personal so they don't blame the system. As elementary principal, I thought I was the "cooler". It was not surprising, then, that I was angry when the advocates attacked my credibility. Animosity and adversarial relations were part of the process I was so good at. Why had not someone told me of my inevitable failure to do my job and engage in shared decision-making mandated by law? Why did it take so long to understand that, like the parent advocates, I was the "mark." "Cooling" and being "cooled" were the jobs, not making decisions in the best interest of the students. There are profound moral implications here.

An administrative job, a built-in network, overseeing evaluations, being held accountable, writing in school publications, and actively participating in educational processes were all geared to give me the impression that I was participating in the educational decisions about the children in Andrew Elementary school. Even though I was perceived as a legitimate participant in the special education decision-making process, I was not. In fact, the parent advocates were in a better position to make demands. That is an important point. This case was about winning and losing; demands and threats; contestation and resistance. The dialogue necessary for shared decision-making was never a part of what took place. The structural inevitability of our collective failure to share decision-making in matters of special education was a direct consequence of federal law, allegiance to a dysfunctional organizational ideology, a resistance to

outsiders, and a focus on winning. This was the case for the Andrew County administration. It was also the case for Face to Face.

Conclusion

There was an inherent "rightness" to the way that the events in this case evolved. The conventional wisdom is that parents or advocates face a "David and Goliath" situation when they attempt to participate in educational decisions about their children. However, public law provides the means to inhibit domination of educational decision-making by educators, at least for disabled students and their parents. The cultural capital developed by the parent advocates gave them the competence and the confidence to limit administrative domination.

What the parent advocates gained, however, was not legitimate access to decision-making. In their efforts to gain access, they accepted the organizational ideology, the concomitant cultural assumptions, and adopted organizational tactics to limit administrative domination. In other words, to limit domination, they dominated. Administrative reaction to the build-up of cultural capital was to "cool out the mark." The tactics of both the administration and parent advocates were typically authoritative and effective in the short term. In the long term, they usurped the possibility for the fundamental educational restructuring necessary for shared decision-making.

The intense dialectical interplay that took place in Andrew county resulted from a pervasive hegemony of ruralness combined with the use and abuse of cultural capital by both the administration and the parent advocates. Traditional organizational logic provided the rationale for administrative actions and ideology. What is absent

from organizational theory, and the logic that supports it, is an explanation of how parents and advocates must act in relation to it. Educators, particularly administrators, should not be the sole arbiters of education. Everyone involved in the educational process must engage in the discourse. Administrators, having been socialized to see themselves as the most important persons in the schools (NASSP, 1990), need to come to an understanding of their role in the decision-making process.

The issues involved in special education have forced an ideological shift in education that require a fundamental rethinking of those roles and a sensitivity to parents (Callahan & Olson 1994; Capper, 1989). Not surprisingly, this shift is accompanied by a dialectical resistance and contestation that was dramatized in this case (Budoff, 1975). Special education, especially in rural communities, is the bell weather that should inform educators about the difficulties they will face in the movement toward restructuring. Of tremendous import in the restructuring process are the assumptions that the stakeholders bring to the schools. This case demonstrated that hegemonic assumptions about ruralness that include notions such as "bigger is better" or "ruralness is culturally modest" are assumptions that pull organizations away from the real issues. Rather than focusing on engagement and inclusion, they establish an exclusionary level of quality for decision-making antithetical to restructuring.

"Ruralness", which includes a strong sense of community, a basic appreciation for education, a concern for the youth it serves, and a resistance to centralized authority, may provide the best opportunity for improving schools by making them more rural-like and responsive to

community (Lutz, Lutz, & Tweeddale, 1990). This is because "ruralness" rejects hegemonic cultural assumptions. These rural attitudes have problems. Resistance to centralized authority was surely factor in the rejection of "outsider" evaluations by the administration. It also played a part in the advocates rejection of administrative input as well. On the other hand, ruralness creates a sense of self as a part of a community. The educational community needs to to develop this sense of itself. Educators and advocates must recognize the cultural assumptions that encourage contestation and inhibit cooperation by default.

DeYoung and Lawrence (1995) ask the question: "Whom does the school serve and whom might it serve if building communities rather than careers were to become the aim of education reform?" (p.112). If this were the case, how would the parent advocates have been treated? Conversely, how would they have treated the administration?

The caption under the picture read:

> Honored - Sarah Farmer, an Andrew county resident, was honored by the Southeast Regional Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder (CHADD) chapter. She received one of the first Special Educators awards presented to educators and counselors in the Southeast region. (Andrew County Republic-Monitor, November 30, 1995)

"Hey Wayne, did you see the paper? Sarah's an educator now," I said sarcastically. "Yeah, can you believe it?" he said. "I'm gonna start the rumor at the bank that she's a finalists in the superintendent search". There was laughter. The dialectic continues.

REFERENCES

Acker, J. (1990, June). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. Gender & society, 4(2), 139-158.

Alpert,S., Schloss, P.J., & Schloss, C.N. (1995). Families of children with disabilities in elementary and middle school: Advocacy models and strategies. Exceptional Children, 62(3), 261-270.

Berkeley, T.R. & Bull, K.S. (1995). Voices in rural special education: Retrospectives, prospectives, possibilities. Rural special Education Journal, 14(2), 10-16.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In J. Karabel & A.H. Halsey (Eds.) Power and ideology in education (pp. 487-511). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Budoff, M. (1975). Engendering change in special education practice. Harvard Education Review, 45(4), 507-526.

Callahan, J.P. & Olson, J. (1994). Parent satisfaction with professionals having a family systems orientation to early intervention. Rural Special Education Quarterly, 13(2), 12-18.

Capper, C. (1990). Students with severe disabilities in general education classrooms: Barriers in rural, poor settings. Journal of Rural and Small Schools, 5(3), 13-17.

Capper, C. (1989). Students with severe disabilities in the general education program: A conceptual and practical framework for rural school administrators. Journal of Rural and Small Schools, 4(1), 52-59.

Clark, B.R. (1960, May). The "Cooling-Out" function in higher education. The American Journal of Sociology, 65, 569-576.

Codd, J. (1982). Some ethical problems in special education. Australian Journal of Special Education, 6, 8-14.

David, M. E. (1989). Schooling and the family. In H. H. Giroux & P. McLaren (Eds.) Critical pedagogy, the state and cultural struggle. (pp. 50-65). New York: SUNY Press.

Denzin, N. (1978). The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods, (2nd ed.), New York: McGraw-Hill.

DeYoung, A.J. (1987). The status of American rural education research: An integrated review and commentary. Review of Educational Research, 57(2), 123-148.

DeYoung, A.J., & Lawrence, B.K. (1995). On Hoosiers, Yankees, and mountaineers. Phi Delta Kappan, 77(2), 104-112.

Goffman, R. (1952). Cooling out the mark: Some aspects of adaptation to failure. Psychiatry, 15, 451-463.

Guba E. & Lincoln, Y. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Hutto, N. & Page, B. (1994). Special education: An administrative dilemma. Journal of rural and Small Schools, 4(3), 43-45.

Lareau, A. (1989). Home Advantage: Social class and parental intervention in elementary education. New York, NY: Falmer Press.

Lutz, F.W., Lutz,S.B., & Tweeddale, P. (1990). Rural education: A kinder gentler world. Journal of Rural and Small Schools, 5(1), 48-55.

National Association of Elementary School Principals. (1990). Principals for 21st century schools. Alexandria, VA.

Office of Civil Rights Investigative Report. NO. 07901028. (1990).

Parker, W.C. (1995). The urban curriculum and the allocating function of schools. In E. Stevens & G. Woods(Eds.) Justice, Ideology, and Education 178-182. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

Patton, M.Q. (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods. (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA; Sage.

Payzant, T. (1992). Advocacy groups, role in educational policymaking. Encyclopedia of Educational Research 6th ed. Marvin Alkin, Ed. 1, 35-39

Rosenfeld, S. (1981). A portrait of rural America: Conditions affecting vocational education policy.

Seal, K.R., & Harmon, H.L. (1995). Realities of rural school reform. Phi Delta Kappan, 77(2), 119-124.

Sharp, R. (1980). Knowledge, ideology, and the politics of schooling. London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Sher, J.P. (1995). The battle for the soul of rural school reform: Can the Annenberg rural challenge turn the tide? Phi Delta Kappan, 77(2), 143-148.

Smith, J. (1984). The problem of criteria for judging interpretive inquiry. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 6(4), 379-391.

Smith, L. (1982). Ethnography. In H. Mitzel (Ed.), Encyclopedia of educational research (pp. 587-592). Chicago: Rand McNally.

Stake, R. (1978). The case study method in social inquiry. Educational Researcher, 7(2), 5-12.

Stick to Your Guns... (1989, November 14). The Andrew County Republic. p. A2.

Theobald, P. & Nachtigal, P. (1995). Culture, community, and the promise of rural community. Phi Delta Kappan, 77(2), 132-135.

Wei, S.B., Shapero, S., & Boggess, B.W. (1993). Training and retaining rural special educators. Rural Special Education Quarterly. 12(4), 52- 59.

Wolcott, H. (1985). On ethnographic intent. Educational Administration Quarterly. 21, 187-203.

END

U.S. Dept. of Education

Office of Educational
Research and Improvement (OERI)

ERIC

Date Filmed
January 16, 1998